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## LONGSTREET AND THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES.<sup>1</sup>

As a contribution of permanent value to history General Longstreet's book will meet with a hearty welcome from all serious students of the War between the States. Those who prefer eulogies to bare facts and plain truths, will show their teeth at the author, but every Southern man who loves fair play will hail with delight the appearance, from the pen of a Confederate general, of a serious military history which is not written from the fulsome standpoint of the panegyrist.

General Longstreet, as is well known, became a Republican shortly after the war was over. It is a pity that he has not assigned his reasons for his departure from the theories he so earnestly advocated and for which he so bravely and loyally fought on many a great battle field of the war. It is quite certain, however, that the white people of the South could not have accepted, nor would they now accept, any explanation as satisfactory. They have invariably refused to follow any leader into new paths where there was question of a race conflict. It is not because they are intolerant, but because the question will not down at any man's bidding. If Warren Hastings, when he was upholding British interests in India, had in the hour of his triumph, turned over to the feeble and inferior natives all his great talents in an effort to control and subvert the English rule in India, he would have estranged his countrymen and been unanimously repudiated by them. Longstreet's change of politics, it was thought, tended to endanger white supremacy in the South, and for that reason the white people resented his change of party allegiance almost to a man. They are confronted by a disagreeable condition and not an idle theory, and they never have been and never will be governed by a despised

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<sup>1</sup> *From Manassas to Appomattox.* By James Longstreet. Philadelphia. J. B. Lippincott Co. 1895.

and inferior black or colored race. There can be no doubt that General Longstreet never intended that they should be. But the people have not taken that view; they only knew that without an effort on their part, the most singular fact about the matter, millions of negro slaves had their shackles knocked off by fanatics and well meaning people, and were by the same persons, still without any effort for themselves, armed with the tremendous power of the ballot. But the ballot in their hands has been very much like the boomerang in the hands of their compeers, the wild Australian savages. It has hurt those most who expected to see it destroy their own political opponents.

It may be asked what this has to do with General Longstreet and his account of the great civil war? The answer is easy — look at any Southern newspaper and see in how unkind a manner his book is received. A brigadier general charges, in a speech made in a Confederate camp in Virginia, that Longstreet was court-martialed after the battle of Gettysburg and found guilty at Orange C. H., Virginia, of losing that battle, and that the findings were suppressed by General Lee, when in point of fact, such a proceeding was impossible, for officers are never tried in their absence in civilized countries and Longstreet was at the time in Tennessee! The object of this brief review, however, is to take no man's part, but to analyse the statements of General Longstreet, as those of a distinguished eye-witness in the greatest events that have yet occurred on this continent, applying to them the usual rules of evidence. We shall not follow the well-known plan of Sydney Smith who once said, in his own witty style, that the proper way to criticise a book was to write your criticism first and then read the book, since "reading the book first tends to warp one's judgment." We fear, however, that many participants in the war on the Southern side have pursued the first part of Smith's advice, but not the second, for they have certainly criticised and just as certainly have not yet read the book.

James Longstreet was born in Edgefield District, South

Carolina, January 8, 1821. His parents removed from that State to Alabama, after which he was appointed to West Point, where he graduated in 1842. He settled in Georgia in 1875. He was made a major-general in the Confederate Army in 1862 and was in command of the First Army Corps from the date of its organization until the surrender at Appomattox. His grandfather on his maternal side was a first cousin of the great Chief Justice John Marshall, but it is not certain whether the Longstreets are of French, Dutch, or German origin.

Very few of the prominent Confederate writers have expressed any opinion of Longstreet. But General U. S. Grant says: "He was brave, honest, intelligent, a very capable soldier, subordinate to his superiors, just and kind to his subordinates, but jealous of his own rights, which he had the courage to maintain. He was never on the lookout to detect a slight, but saw one as soon as anybody, when, intentionally given."<sup>1</sup> This is the opinion of a great soldier, who knew the man of whom he was writing, and it is entitled to careful consideration.

In many respects General Longstreet's narrative of the war is the most interesting that has been written by a Southern man. He has the advantage of making the closing argument and submitting the facts, as he understands them, to the judgment of the public. He has written with an utter disregard of censure and the public will doubtless in the end give him a fair hearing. It is idle to say that the book is nothing but an attack upon General R. E. Lee. Longstreet simply looks at results from a new point of view, and thus gives his readers new ideas.

His description of the battle of Manassas is the best yet printed. No one can read it without coming to the conclusion that it was really an accident that the victory was not followed up by pursuit of the Federals. General Longstreet says that he gave an order for the artillery to fire on the retreating columns at Centreville which was counter-

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<sup>1</sup> *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, Vol. II. page 87.

manded by one of General J. E. Johnston's staff officers.<sup>1</sup> This unwise person mistook a body of Confederate infantry, by reason of their flag at that time being so nearly like the United States flag, for the enemy, and supposed that they were going to make a flank movement. For this reason the Confederate battle flag was shortly afterwards adopted.

The invasion of Maryland in 1862 by General R. E. Lee is treated in a most interesting way. The address to the people of that State issued at Fredericktown, September 8, 1862, is given and the use that is made of the celebrated decision of Chief Justice Taney in the Merryman case,<sup>2</sup> revives one of the most painful memories of the war to the citizen who had been taught to revere the Constitution. As to the part which the "lost order" played in the battle of Sharpsburg, Longstreet's views are so peculiar that they should be given in his own words. He says: "It is difficult to find that a quicker move was given the Union army, in consequence of the 'lost dispatch'; but one may rather concede General Hill's claim, that in consequence of that dispatch the Union army was so delayed as to give the Confederates time to make their way back to the soil of 'Old Virginia'. Without it the main column of the Union forces could have marched through Crompton's Pass and relieved Harper's Ferry on the 14th, but guided by it their commander found it important to guard against the seventeen brigades that should be at Turner's Pass, on the right rear of a column, moving against Crompton's." <sup>3</sup>

That the result of the invasion was a pitched battle with the Potomac River in the Confederate rear absolutely barring their line of retreat in case of disaster on the field, no one can attempt to deny. A study of maps, other than those found in the book, which are not good, will convince any one that the failure was caused by the inability of the Confederates to concentrate in time. Whether the "lost dispatch" was the cause of this is by no means clear.

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<sup>1</sup> *Manassas to Appomattox*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Campbell's Reports*, p. 246.

<sup>3</sup> *Manassas to Appomattox*, p. 283.

Longstreet, in his review of this campaign, says of McClellan and Lee, the opposing commanders, that they were both masters of the science but not of the art of war. The failure of the campaign was a terrible blow to the cause of the Confederacy. It did not mean utter ruin, but it was depressing to the last degree. Our author says that in the spring of '63, it was evident that the only way to save the declining fortunes of the Confederacy was by massing troops on interior lines.<sup>1</sup> He insists that while on his way through Richmond in the early spring of that year he called on the Secretary of War and unsuccessfully urged these views upon him. The influence of President Davis, who believed in foreign intervention, was opposed to Longstreet's theories, so nothing was done at that time.

The appointment of R. S. Ewell and A. P. Hill as lieutenant-generals, after the death of "Stonewall" Jackson, caused some ill feeling at the time, which crops out again in this book, as for example in the footnote where it is said that D. H. Hill was next in rank to General Ewell, that his record was as good as that of "Stonewall" Jackson, but that not being a Virginian, *he was not so well advertised.*<sup>2</sup>

There is no reason to doubt the fact that the influence of Virginia was immense in the Confederacy, but is there any evidence to support this charge? Did any one ever deny the greatness of General N. B. Forrest because he was not a Virginian? Family influence doubtless counted for more than real merit in many of the minor places in the Confederate army, but not among the appointments to the higher grades of offices.

The salient point in these commentaries is the battle of Gettysburg, but of the advance into Pennsylvania there is no space to treat, nor in a general review, such as this, is it possible to go into minute details about the battle itself. As we see it now, the mistakes on both sides are plain, and they were common. During the war it seemed impos-

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<sup>1</sup> *Id.*, Page 327.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, Page 332

sible for the commanders on either side to handle large bodies of men so as to get them promptly into action. It is plain to us all, independently of the statements of General Longstreet, that the order issued to General J. E. B. Stuart was so ambiguous that it was, to all intents and purposes, *carte blanche*. The year before, after the battle of Sharpsburg, General R. E. Lee had authorized him to ride through the towns and counties of Central Pennsylvania, entirely out of touch with the main army. General Stuart considered that he had the right under his orders to keep between the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac, or to attempt to make the circuit of the latter army. He decided to ride around that army and did so. But the most effective use made of cavalry was to keep the general in command informed of the movements of the enemy. This ride prevented Stuart from giving this information, and it is certain that at the commencement of the battle of Gettysburg General Lee did not know the numbers and positions of the Northern army. Had he kept Stuart in touch, as he should have done, he would have been informed.

Whatever may have been the real nature of the disputes between Lee and Longstreet at Gettysburg, it is certain from General Lee's subsequent conduct that Longstreet still retained his commander's respect and high regard. And, as it appears to us now, there was almost no chance of success in the enemy's country, where the Confederates were attacking him on his own chosen ground. It is true that the magnificent fight made by the Confederate private soldiers in Pickett's famous charge, will never be forgotten while the love of heroism and bravery continues to charm mankind. But

In vain the Tennessean set  
His breast against the bayonet.

The proper object of a fight is to win a victory and not to strike blows. A victory that is fruitless is a useless sacrifice.

General Longstreet has this to say of the delay in making the charge at Gettysburg: "General Lee said that the attack of his right was not made as early as expected,—which he should not have said. He knew that I did not believe that success was possible; that care and time should be taken to give the troops the benefit of positions and the grounds; and he should have put an officer in charge who had more confidence in his plan."<sup>1</sup> That it was the duty of the commanding officer to have removed Longstreet, under the circumstances, there can be no doubt.

Our author's description of his wounding at the battle of the Wilderness gives us a picture of the man and shows his kindness of heart to those who were near to him:

"As my litter was borne to the rear my hat was placed over my face, and soldiers by the roadside said 'he is dead, and they are telling us that he is only wounded.' Hearing this repeated from time to time, I raised my hat with my left hand, when the burst of voices and the flying of hats in the air eased my pains somewhat.

"But Micah Jenkins who fell by the same fire, was no more. He was one of the most estimable characters of the army. His taste and talent were for military service. He was intelligent, quick, untiring, attentive, zealous in discharge of duty, truly faithful to official obligations, abreast with the foremost in battle and withal a humble, noble Christian. In a moment of highest earthly hope he was transported to serenest heavenly joy; to that life beyond that knows no bugle call, beat of drum, or clash of steel. May his beautiful spirit, through the mercy of God, rest in peace! Amen!"<sup>2</sup>

This sincere, if somewhat florid tribute to one of South Carolina's ablest soldiers, is a touching instance of how devoted Longstreet was to his best general of division.

There are some singular errors in the book, although the typography is in the main excellent. For example wher-

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<sup>1</sup> *Id.* 388.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 556.



ever the name of General T. T. Munford is mentioned it is spelled *Mumford*, except once and there,<sup>1</sup> Col. Williams C. Wickham in command of the Fourth Virginia Cavalry, is called William C. Wickham.

We may conclude by expressing the belief that almost all of the uncritical estimates of General Longstreet and his book have had their origin in his change of politics, and that the impartial reader will be impressed with the fact that the story given in this volume is Longstreet's own, and that it is entitled to the great weight which attaches to the testimony of an honest and competent eye witness.

S. S. P. PATTESON.

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<sup>1</sup> *Id.* p. 271.